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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the Partnerships for Student Success study, which will not evaluate programs or polices, but will seek to identify and examine the aspects of inter-level governance and related state policies that contribute to, or detract from, effective and coherent connections between schools and colleges. Partnerships for Student Success will examine in depth the practical governance realities involving K-12 collaboration in four states. A major objective is to raise public consciousness about the growing impact of K-16 issues on public schools and colleges. The project will identify and emphasize the kinds of pragmatic steps that can prove useful for states that look for long-term institutional change. In 2003 and 2004, field research will be conducted in Florida, Georgia, New York, and Oregon. (SLD)

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Partnerships for Student Success:

Policy Connections between Schools and Colleges

September 3, 2003

This project is made possible by generous support from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.

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The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education is partnering with researchers from the Institute for Educational Leadership and Stanford University's Institute for Higher Education Research to examine state policies and governance that span elementary, secondary, and higher education. This research into inter-level programs and K-16 policies will help states learn about promising reforms and ways to connect their education systems to benefit all students.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS will not evaluate programs or policies; rather, the project will seek to identify and examine the aspects of inter-level governance and related state policies that contribute to, or detract from, effective and coherent connections between schools and colleges. The project springs from the premise that there is an increasingly pressing need to close the gap between K-12 and postsecondary education systems. It is supported by a grant from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.

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The Deep Gap in Educational Connections and Its Impact on Students

Almost all high school seniors intend to go to college directly after graduation, and the vast majority do attend some form of postsecondary education. These educational aspirations reach across racial and ethnic lines to include all groups of students.[1] Yet the nation's disconnected K-12 and postsecondary education systems reflect an earlier era in which only an elite group of students attended college. As a recent national study has found,

> States have created unnecessary and detrimental barriers between high school and college, barriers that are undermining these student aspirations. . . . High school assessments often stress different knowledge and skills than do college entrance and placement requirements. Similarly, the coursework between high school and college is not connected; students graduate from high school under one set of standards and, three months later, are required to meet a whole new set of standards in college. Current data systems are not equipped to address students' needs across systems. This means that no one is held accountable for issues related to student transitions from high school to college.[2]

This lack of adequate communication and connection contributes to students' lack of preparation for college. It particularly harms the growing numbers of first-generation college-goers and economically disadvantaged students-

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students who often need very clear information about what it takes to succeed in college. But this lack of "college knowledge" extends to other students as well, many of whom, once they enter college, find themselves unprepared for college-level courses and in need of remedial classes. While over 70% of high school graduates go on to college, 40% of students at four-year institutions, and 63% at two-year institutions, take some remedial education. Large numbers of students drop out before their second year and never finish their degree.[3]

These high remediation and drop-out rates reflect significant human and institutional costs. A college education greatly improves an individual's opportunities for economic security in today's marketplace. Data from the U.S. Census illustrate the significant economic returns of enhanced education. In 2000, the median annual earnings for workers ages 25 and over with a high school diploma was $24,267, compared with $26,693 for workers with an associate's degree and $40,314 for those with a bachelor's degree.[4]

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[1] "Ticket to Nowhere: The Gap Between Leaving High School and Entering College and High Performance Jobs," in *Thinking K-16* (3), No. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Education Trust, 1999).

[2] A. Venezia, M. Kirst, and A. Antonio, *Betraying the College Dream: How Disconnected Systems Undermine Student Aspirations* (Stanford, CA: Bridge Project, Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research, 2003).

[3] National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 2001), p. 148.

[4] U.S. Bureau of the Census, *CPS Annual Demographic Survey*, March Supplement (Washington, D.C.: 2001), http://ferret.bls.census.gov/macro/032001/perinc/new03_001.htm.

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Although there is a distressing lack of congruence between K-12 and postsecondary systems nationwide, some collaborative efforts between schools and colleges have been emerging throughout the country. Unfortunately, there is little understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of these programs, the policies that might institutionalize and sustain them, and the many powerful deterrents that can undermine them. For instance, several states have created short-term structural approaches to address inter-level concerns, but without accounting for the complexities and roots of K-16 problems. It is difficult to envision meaningful, sustainable K-16 advances without a knowledge base that would provide a substantive underpinning for devising inter-level strategies that could be effective over the long-term.

The fragmented manner in which policy is made on issues that span the K-16 continuum-such as governance, finance, curricula, assessments, accountability, teacher education, data collection. and data usage-also suggests a need for better understanding of the state governance structures that will permit improved planning and connections across the education sectors.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS, by examining in depth the practical governance realities involving K-16 collaboration in four states, will identify and emphasize the kinds of pragmatic steps that can prove useful to states that seek to transform ad hoc, short-term, inter-level approaches from

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rhetoric into sustained action and long-term institutionalized change. In addition to providing recommendations to help states successfully develop and institutionalize their K-16 reforms, a major objective of this project is to raise public consciousness about the growing impact of K-16 issues on public schools and colleges.

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Governance structures can be a lens for examining a broad array of factors that widen or narrow the gap between the schools and the colleges. The project's main research questions include:

- To what extent is K-16 reform perceived as a state policy concern?
- What are the incentives and disincentives for improved connections?
- What are the main goals and objectives of current state-level K-16 reforms?
- Who is responsible for developing and implementing those changes? How do governors, key legislators, and agencies influence inter-level programs?
- What have been the main successes and failures to date?
- What changes in these structures, processes, and relationships, if any, have taken place since the reforms were initiated?
- To what extent do state budgetary practices impede or encourage the establishment and viability of inter-level programs?
- What is the short- and long-term outlook for inter-level relationships? Is legislative or gubernatorial action to promote collaboration likely? Are specific connective mechanisms operational or being proposed?
- How do the reforms, incentives, disincentives, successes, and barriers differ among the case-study states, and why?
- In what ways, and under what circumstances, do cooperation and conflict between the levels manifest themselves?

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In 2003 and 2004, analysts will conduct field research in four case-study states: Florida, Georgia, New York, and Oregon. The four states have taken divergent approaches to K-16 reform that are illustrative of different types of policy approaches and governance structures. The project will be concluded in 2005, with the completion of four state-specific policy briefs and a final report synthesizing the case studies and identifying their implications for K-16 policymaking. The final report will be disseminated nationally to a wide range of political, business, civic, and educational groups.

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The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that promotes public policies that enhance opportunities for quality education and training beyond high school.

This project is made possible by generous support from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.

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